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ABSTRACT

In 1553 the work that is touted as the first complete book written in English on rhetoric was published, Thomas Wilson's "Arte of Rhetorique." It became so popular it enjoyed eight printings within its century. Wilson was not a person to translate and read just for knowledge; he believed that knowledge should be imparted to the general public. "The Arte of Rhetorique" is the embodiment of Cicero and Quintilian with the help of Aristotle. The Aristotelian influence, however, is not that of his "Rhetoric" but rather the "Nicomachean Ethics." One matter that must be understood from the outset is that humanist ideology did not do away with Aristotle in general but with Aristotle as he was understood and employed in medieval times. Aristotle remained a considerable influence in the Renaissance. Research has shown that Wilson had knowledge of Aristotle's "Rhetoric" and "Organon," but were the "Ethics" in circulation during his lifetime? The "Ethics" would have been useful for Wilson not only in exposition but also from the conception of "arete" or virtue--primarily moral and intellectual virtue. Wilson was writing a book of rhetoric that places value on moral and intellectual excellence for the benefit of his fellow Englishman, noble and lay person alike. Examples from Cicero, Quintilian, and Aristotle clearly show the influence on this humanist thinker. Wilson lived up to the ideal of practicing human values for the good of society and government. (Contains nine references.) (TB)

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Mens sana in corpore sano:

Human Values in Thomas Wilson' *The Arte of Rhetorique*.

Presented at the Penn State Conference of Rhetoric and Composition

July 12-15, 1995

University Park, Penn.

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In 1553 the work that was, and still is, touted to be the first complete book written in English on rhetoric was published, Thomas Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique*. It became so popular it acquired eight printings within its own century. Thus, establishing Wilson as an eminent scholar. In fact, there has been little to no criticism as to the quality of the work, or to its contribution to the rhetorical art. However, the main issue debated about is the influences present within the work. For example, Russell Wagner attributes the influence to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Cicero's *De Oratore*, and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*; Albert Schimdt attributes it to Cicero and Quintilian, but questions the influence of Aristotle, R. J. Schoek attributes it to Quintilian, Cicero's *De Inventione*, as well as *De Oratore*, and the work of pseudo-Cicero's *Rhetorica ad Herennium* just to name a few. Other scholars such as Jebb, Hallam, and Saintsbury have gone as far as saying "Wilson embodied rules chiefly from Aristotle, with help from Cicero and Quintilian" (Wagner 12). This paper will forward the reverse, it is the embodiment of Cicero, and Quintilian with the help of Aristotle. However, the Aristotelian influence is not his *Rhetoric* but the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

These debates only raise questions as to why Wilson would use any Aristotelian influence when he was part of the humanist movement? Since it was this movement that reacted against the medieval scholasticism strongly based on Aristotle. In addition, would Wilson have had any knowledge of Aristotle other than the *Rhetoric*? To answer these questions Wilson's education must investigated, as well as the reception of Aristotelianism in the Renaissance.

Wilson attended Eton, and in 1541 traveled to Kings College, Cambridge where he received his Bachelors of Arts degree in 1545, his Masters of Arts in 1549, and he continued living at Cambridge until 1553. It was at Cambridge where Wilson meet the most influential people of his life, who are often called the Cambridge humanists: John Cheke, Thomas Smith, Roger Ascham, Walter Haddon, and others. To these humanists "their purpose was to render the classics into an unadorned English in order to facilitate the transmission of ideas on morality, citizenship, and religion" (Schmitt 55). They played not only a major role in Wilson's academic career but in the influence of the Cambridge educational system.

The humanist, according to Russell Wagner, such as "Cheke and Smith, quite naturally, because of age, position, and learning, were especially concerned with reviving the best of Greek and Roman literature and Philosophy . . . especially in the six years of Edward's rule, ceaselessly busy in the multifold work of reviving and disseminating the Greek and Latin classics, in popularizing the use of English, and in improving the methods of education" (6). The importance of bringing forth the important "best of Greek and Roman" works would dispel the belief that all Aristotlianism was not allowed. Furthermore, it was not only important to translate these classics but they believed the classics should be presented to the English society in their own vernacular. Thus, the humanists would not totally dismiss Aristotle, just the Medieval conception of him.

For the Cambridge humanists, Wilson was the perfect candidate for this scholarly circle, he was proficient in Latin, a very good student, a politically active individual, and with the help of Cheke, was fluent in Greek--which he later proves in his translation of

Demosthene's *Orations*. To grasp the conception of Wilson as a student, G.H. Mair states:

> He was one of a band of grave and dignified scholars, men preoccupied wit morality and citizenship as well as with the lighter problem of learning and style' and in Twaney's view, 'Wilson for all his scholarship, belonged to the older tradition, the tradition which held that this is the true ordering of the state of a well-fashioned commonwealth, that every part do obey on head, one governor, one law, as all parts of the body obey the head, agree among themselves, and one not to eat up another through greediness, and that we see that order, moderation, and reason bridle the affections. (qtd in Schoek 121)

Wilson was not one to translate and read books just for knowledge, he believed that knowledge should be imparted to his fellow Englishmen for the commonwealth. Wilson states it himself, "Againe, when wee see our frend enclined to any kind of learning, we must consaile him to take that way still, by reason persuade him, that it were the meetest way for him to doe his Countrie most good" (31). To Wilson it was not education for knowledge but education for the good of the country, and for human values. It was through the translations, conceptions, and writings--without "inkhorn terms" of course--that Wilson and his fellow humanists directed their efforts. Thus, acquiring followers and perpetuating moral value, as well as intellectual value for the good of the country.

However, could Aristotelianism fall into the ideology of the humanist in the Renaissance? As stated before, the humanist movement wished to abolish medieval Aristotelianism. Instead of the often misinterpreted belief that the humanistic movement abolished Aristotle in general. Aristotle's influence was present during the Renaissance. The translated works were primarily in Latin but none the less their influence was still present. C.H. Lohr's article "Renaissance Latin Aristotle Commentaries" gives us twelve various types of Aristoteliansim present during the time of the Renaissance:

1. the commentarious (expositio, explicatio, lecutra, praelectio, scholia, etc.) and these continued to be the principal form of exegesis. However, Renaissance commentators often combined many books.
2. the quaestiones (primarily in Italy)
3. the cursus (summa, tractatio, institutio).
4. the paraphrase.
5. the monograph or independent treatise.
6. the compendium of abbreviatio.
7. the synopsis of conclusions (which gave principal Aristotelian theses).
8. the fores of auctoritates (or excerpts from his work).
9. the tablua or alphabet. Usually an arrangement of Aristotle's lexicon.
10. the glossa concerned primarily with philological points.
11. the oratio--author's conception of Aristotle's Philosophy.

12. the praefatio--often intended to introduce new editions of the Greek text or new Latin translations, but occasionally entered into questions of interpretation.

Number 1-9 are taken from the Middle Ages, 10-12 are originally attributed to the Renaissance. (230-232)

Keeping in mind these twelve various types of Aristotlianism, Wilson would have conveyed either the *oratio*, and/or the *praefatio*. This conclusion can be drawn since Wilson's first book *The Rule of Reason* published in 1551, is often attributed to his conception of Aristotle's *Organon*, it should be stated that at no time is it every attributed as a direct translation of the *Organon*. It would follow that Wilson would first read, translate, and interpret the work; then deem it worthy of knowledge to impart upon his fellow Englishman. Thus integrating his conception of the philosophy of the work into *The Rule of Reason*, and if Wilson felt it necessary to use an oratio in one work, it would not be out of the question for Wilson to accomplish it again--only this time with the *Nicomachean Ethics*?

However, this leads to another question, whether Wilson would have come into contact with the *Nicomachean Ethics*. We know he had knowledge of the *Rhetoric*, and the *Organon*, but were the *Ethics* in circulation during his life time? First, the *Ethics* were present during his academic education. Secondly, since he was an excellent student, and was fluent in Greek, as well as Latin, he did not need to wait for a translated version to be published. Nor would he believe the *Ethics* should be translated into Latin for

publication for the masses. Instead it was important for Wilson and the humanist group to write in their vernacular as opposed to the vernacular of Medieval academics. Thus, like his *Rule of Reason*, he could integrate his conception of the philosophy of the *Ethics* within the *Art of Rhetoric*. In fact, in the 1909 reprint edition of *The Arte of Rhetorique*, G.H. Mair, in the introduction in this edition, attributes a small influence of the *Ethics* in Wilson's work. In addition, Samuel Howell in his work *Logic and Rhetoric in England* comments upon Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique* "Wilson briefly advises the exposition should begin with the general and descend to the parts, as Cicero had done in *De Officiis*, and as Aristotle had done in the *Ethics*" (21).

The *Ethics* would be useful for Wilson not only in exposition, but also from the conception of *arete* or virtue--primarily moral and intellectual virtue. Not virtue in our sense of morality per se, since arete--like so many Greek words--pose problems for translation into English.[1] Thus, Wilson wrote a book of rhetoric which places value upon moral and intellectual excellence for the benefit of his fellow Englishman, noble and lay person alike.

However if this is a work of rhetoric would Wilson exclusively use Cicero, Quintilian, Pseudo-Cicero and exclude Aristotle's *Rhetoric*? Wilson wanted to convey a rhetoric that was more than a value free formula, Aristotle's techne would not convey to Wilson's audience the importance of rhetoric. Since the techne was a very reasonable and logical *ars*, the *Rhetoric* would be a very objective rhetoric to our author. Wilson knew this could be used either for the good of man, or the evil of man, and that human

[1] This paper will define virtue in the same manner as David Ross does, that of excellence.

beings could be swayed with emotion. Which is why he states what is required for an orator: "1. To teach; 2. To delight; 3. And to persuade" (46)--which is taken from Cicero's *probare, delectare, and permovere*. He deliberately places persuasion last, since in his conception the first responsibility of a orator would be to educate his audience, he includes delight since in order to educate and persuade an orator has to keep the audiences attention--or "delight" them. Thus he selects Cicero, Quintilian, and Pseudo-Ciceronian. He wants a rhetoric that has value, that will involve people into the ideal of "all parts of the body obey the head." He wanted his fellow Englishman involve themselves in society, government, and make morally sound decisions for the betterment of themselves and England.

Quintilian would be a powerful author for Wilson since in the *De institutione oratoria* he addresses the importance and education of the *orator perfectus*. In fact, Quintilan defines it as "oratory is the power of judging and discoursing on such civil matters that are put before it with a certain persuasiveness, action of the body, and delivery" (II.15.XXII), and when he discusses what is the responsibility of an orator, "to protect the innocent, defend the truth, deter criminal behavior, inspire the military, and in general inspire the citizen body" (XII.1.XXVI-XXVIII). Like Quintilian, Wilson attributes incredible responsibility to the orator, and it is the orators duty to educate, protect, rally, and support the citizens for the good of the country.

The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* includes a detailed treatment of rhetoric including arrangement, expression, memory, and delivery. However, Cicero's is the strongest influence present throughout *The Art of Rhetoric*. Wilson's work can be attributed to at

least two Ciceronian works, *De inventione*, a work written early in Cicero's career, and *De Oratore* which was written much later in his life. At this time I will briefly touch upon a few passages of Cicero's since as early stated, the theses is to prove the influence of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. In *De inventione* the definition of invention is very similar to *The Art of Rhetoric*. As Cicero states,

> Inventio est excogitatio rerum verarum aut veri similium quae causam probabilem reddant.
> [Invention is the discovery of valid or seemingly valid arguments to render's one cause plausible]. (I.9.VII)

Wilson states, "To find out apt matter, called otherwise invention, is a searching out of things true or things likely, the which may reasonably set forth a matter and make it appear probable (19). Both state that invention is a finding out of arguments, and establishing enough "matter" in order to make the arguments work. The other four parts--arrangement, expression (style), memory, and delivery respectively--also follow along similar grounds. Many times over, *The Art of Rhetoric* is often very close to Cicero's work, and on other occasions the work seems to suggest another influence. Wilson has extracted the guidelines for rhetoric from *De inventione*, has elaborated upon the orator with the help of *De oratore*, Quintilian, and Pseudo-Cicero, and has come up with a rhetoric of value. However, there is still a piece missing. There has to be a purpose for Wilson to feel it necessary to write this work. The humanist begins to emerge, Wilson

has written this book for a certain audience--the young nobleman who were to acquire their education. He is attempting to teach, delight, and persuade them to advocate human values for the good of the country.

In addition to the similarities to Cicero's work, there is the influence of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Again, a few examples are in order. In the discussion of wisdom Aristotle states, "Therefore wisdom must plainly be the most finished of the forms of knowledge. It follows that the wise man must know not only what follows from the first principles, but must also possess truth about the first principles" (VI.7.XXXIII). Wilson's statement on wisdom is: "Prudence, or wisdom (for I will here take them both for one), is a virtue that is occupied evermore in searching out truth . . . by knowing truth, wisdom is attained" (73). Both attribute wisdom to knowledge, but in order to acquire wisdom you must first know the truth. Another such comparison also shows similarities, and in fact, Wilson directly attributes it to Aristotle:

> If anyone shall have just cause to dispraise an evil man, he shall soon do it if he can praise a good man. For as Aristotle doth say, of contraries there is one and the same doctrine, and therefore he that can do the one shall soon be able to do the other. (59)

Aristotle discusses the responsibility of humans for either being bad as well as good--in accordance to the address to students:

> Therefore virtue also in our power, and so too vice. For where it is in our power to act it is also in our power not to act, and vice versa, so that, if to act, where is noble, is in our power, to act, which will be base, will also be in our power. Now if it is in our power not to do them, and this was what being good or bad meant, then it is in our power to be virtuous or vicious. (III.5.-1^{b}9)

Both point out, it is in the power of human beings to be either good or bad, noble or base. Wilson is addressing the power of good and bad to students, and is commending a noble personage for the benefit of young Englishman. In the same commendation, Wilson states, "rather minding discreetly what they ought to do than vainly devising what they best can do" (57). This statement from Wilson is very similar to part of Aristotle's main theses in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. It is not what you receive from doing good that is important since that would be "vainly devised," rather it is the unselfish action alone that is good. It is important to do the best you can do, or more poignantly to find the golden mean of life. Wilson wanted his fellow Englishman to be noble and possess the humanist belief, incorporate all the good from the classics and mold them to their model. Our author succeeds by integrating his conception of Aristotle's *Ethics* in his work.

One last example of the similarities between *The Art of Rhetoric* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* must be addressed. In the example Wilson gives in Commendation of justice, and true dealing the similarities are astounding. Although it is far too lengthy to place within this paper, a brief overview will be forwarded. Wilson expounds upon the virtue of justice in relation to laws both of nature and of the commonwealth. It is

through virtue that mean for justice is found, and an explanation of the importance of laws. Aristotle also states this when discussing the same subject. In fact, it is this section in Wilson which brought G. H. Mair to the conclusion that Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* were present in the text.

Thus, there is proof that Aristotle's influence was felt in a humanist's writings. Through *oratio* Wilson translated virtues, or excellence for his readers. He was attempting to not only gain followers for the humanist movement, but also to impart the knowledge upon his fellow Englishmen.

Wilson, along with the other humanists, felt it their duty to acquire knowledge from the Classics; not just the rhetorical classics, but the philosophical ones as well. The insurgence of direct translations of these classical texts into English during the early Renaissance clearly is attributed to the humanists, and Wilson was not the only translator. However, he was one of the few labeled as a translator. Wilson lived up to his ideal of practicing human values for the good of society, and government. He was extremely active in government holding many important offices. Our author used the combination of Aristotlianism and other classical texts to convey the humanist ideology, i.e., human values.

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